

NATURE NOTES



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Director & Editor: Roy A. Kennan

It is the purpose of this monthly bulletin, sent free of charge to all members of The Thames Science Center, to report on activities at the Center, both in the month just past and in the months to come, to welcome new members to the organization, and to offer informational articles in the field of Natural Science.

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
December 1964

Hello There!

Our last Newsletter said "October has been a busy month...". Well, let me tell you, so were November and December! They were so busy and confused that Nature Notes got completely out of whack! I'll try to explain a little here, and then finish the job in the January Nature Notes, which will be published very soon...

As you have no doubt noticed, Nature Notes has been behind on its publication dates since it started...No. 1 was mailed Sept. 30th, No. 2 was mailed Nov. 7th, and No. 3, in the November 1964 issue of PEQUOT TRAILS, was mailed December 24th! We had hoped to get No. 4 out to you by Christmas, but the printer who does PEQUOT TRAILS had an unusual rush of business in November that put TRAILS a full month behind schedule...and Nature Notes along with it.

To try to get things on an even keel, this abbreviated issue of Nature Notes is going out to you now, and it will be followed in about two weeks by a combined issue with the PEQUOT CONSERVATIONIST. In this combined issue we'll try to clear up all the confusion and settle down to "business as usual"...

See you soon in print, and I hope in person also...

Roy A. Kennan

ANNUAL MEETING

JANUARY 27, 1965

8:00 P.M.

AS A MEMBER OF THE THAMES SCIENCE CENTER, INC. YOU ARE
CORDIALLY INVITED TO ATTEND AND PARTICIPATE IN THIS
MEETING. IF YOU HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO VISIT THE CENTER
IN RECENT MONTHS THIS WILL BE A FINE OPPORTUNITY FOR
YOU TO SEE THE CHANGES AND ADDITIONS THAT HAVE BEEN
MADE , AND TO HEAR OUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE .

MRS. JOHN KASHANSKI , PRESIDENT OF THE CORPORATION,
WILL BE ENDING HER TERM OF OFFICE AT THIS MEETING.
SHE HAS WORKED UNCEASINGLY IN MANY OTHER WAYS THAN AS
PRESIDENT TO HELP IMPROVE THE CENTER AS A PLACE FOR
YOUR CHILDREN TO DEVELOP AN APPRECIATION OF NATURE.
...COMING TO THIS MEETING WILL GIVE YOU AN OPPORTUNITY
TO PERSONALLY THANK HER FOR ALL THAT SHE HAS DONE.

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE PEQUOT-SEPOS
WILDLIFE SANCTUARY , AS AGREED UPON UNDER THE TRIAL
MERGER , WILL BE ATTENDING THIS MEETING, AND WILL CON-
DUCT A SHORT BUSINESS MEETING IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING
OUR ANNUAL MEETING PROCEEDINGS .

THE GRAY SQUIRREL
Sciurus carolinensis

This well-known inhabitant of our woodlands is often seen close at hand in parks and back yards, and most of us feel that we know quite a bit about him. However, it sometimes pays to take a closer look at familiar things, to review what we know...and usually to learn something new that we hadn't noticed before.

The Eastern Gray Squirrel, Sciurus carolinensis, is a rodent that reaches an average adult length of 20", including its 10" long tail, and a weight of 3/4 to 1 1/2 pounds. It can run as fast as 12 miles per hour on the ground, and can jump 5 feet on the level, or up to 12 feet between trees, using its tail as a rudder to help keep its balance in midair. Although its name is "Gray", this is only a descriptive phrase, and both black and albino races exist in some areas. A close look at the average specimen will disclose the fact that his gray appearance comes from the combination of white and black bands on the hair of his back and tail, and there is also considerable buff, or reddish-brown, coloring on the back and head. The undersides of the body, head and legs are white, and the backs of the ears are white in winter and gray or buff in summer. The whiskers are black, and there are small patches of stiff guard hairs under the chin and forelegs and on the chest. These hairs are probably used as an aid in judging the size opening it is safe to enter without getting stuck. The eyes are black.

Although we are used to seeing the Gray Squirrel in built-up areas, he is usually considered an inhabitant of fairly deep woods, preferring to live where there are plenty of oak and hickory trees to provide him with food. He is primarily an eater of nuts, but also consumes seeds, fruits, leaves, buds, bark, roots, fungi, insect larvae and pupae, and the eggs of birds. This squirrel will drink open water but can also exist in areas where none is available. As a source of calcium he will gnaw on bones and shed antlers from deer. Gnawing is an important activity of squirrels, because as rodents they are equipped with long, chisel-like incisor teeth that continue to grow throughout the animal's life. If they are not kept worn down by chewing on hard objects they will grow to the point where the animal cannot close his mouth far enough to bring the grinding molars into play. When a squirrel, or other rodent, is kept in captivity this fact becomes important; if there is nothing hard available to chew on the animal can starve to death in the midst of plenty.

In winter the large leaf-and-twig nests of the Gray Squirrel can be seen in forks and crotches of the larger trees. They also have dens which may or may not be underground, where they spend a good part of the colder months. They do not hibernate, and breed in early winter and a second time in early summer, thereby raising two batches of from one to six young a year. The young squirrels are cared for by their mother for about six weeks and then leave the nest, but they usually stay in the immediate area for the remainder of the first season.

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